

# INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY **East Germany**

## REPORT

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SUBJECT Summary and Conclusions of Recent Outbreak  
of Cattle Disease in the DDR

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1. The disease of cattle in the DDR which appeared during the late autumn of 1954 and affected approximately 6,800 cattle during the subsequent winter and early spring, has abated. The causative agent has been identified as a toxic benzol derivative contained in a wax applied to twine. This twine had been used for binding shocks of straw which were shopped as fodder.
2. During the autumn of 1954, the disease appeared in the vicinity of Dresden and by January 1955 had assumed serious proportions. The course of the disease was approximately 28 days and the mortality rate was 12 to 15 percent. Symptoms and pathological changes in affected animals were similar to those caused by the virus of rinderpest. The East German Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry believed the disease to be rinderpest caused by the importation of meat [redacted] Slaughter of all affected cattle was ordered by Dr. Thamm (fnu), Chief of Veterinary Affairs, in an effort to check the spread of the disease and to salvage as much as possible of the carcasses before complete debilitation by the disease.
3. During January, February, and March 1955, a number of meetings were held in the East German Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry. Several Soviet professors arrived for a meeting in February. They also suspected the disease of being rinderpest, although transmission tests at Riems Island and at Leipzig University had failed to demonstrate a causative agent of an infectious nature.
4. Further study of the epidemiology of the disease demonstrated that the outbreaks occurred only among cattle on privately-owned farms; the East German cooperatives were not affected. The search for a toxic substance in common use on privately-owned farms was intensified with the result that a binding twine became suspect. The twine was traced to a factory in Reichenbach, Karl-Marx-Stadt.

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5. In June 1955, Prof. L. Hussel <sup>2/</sup> stated that the factory had produced a binding twine which was a mixture of perlon and natural fiber coated with a red wax as a preservative. This twine was available on the free market and had been purchased by many private farm owners for binding straw shocks. Hay was very scarce during late 1954 and early 1955 and the straw, which was chopped with the binding left on, was utilized as cattle feed. Prof. Johannes Dobberstein and Prof. F. Muessemier <sup>3/</sup> supervised investigations of the toxic effects of the twine. In late May or early June 1955, Dobberstein and Muessemier reported to Prof. Hussel that experimental feeding of small doses of the chopped binding twine produced symptoms in cattle identical with those noted during the course of the disease outbreak. The substance in the binding twine responsible for the toxic effects was a benzol derivative in the wax with which the twine was covered. The factory producing the twine was closed and all supplies of this twine were confiscated.
6. The SED was responsible for capitalizing on the disease outbreak for propaganda purposes. Officials of the East German Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry and scientists involved in the investigation of the disease never suggested the possibility of biological warfare or of introduction into the DDR of a toxin by Western agents. The SED originated such charges but the Ministry officials, scientists, and the farm population of the DDR did not believe the charges to be true.
1. Comment. Prof. Thamm was subsequently relieved of his position and replaced by Dr. Reinhard (fmu). 25X1
2. Comment. Prof. Dr. Hussel was Director of the Veterinary Police Institute of the Veterinary Faculty at Leipzig. In May or June 1955 he was appointed a Deputy Minister of Agriculture in the DDR. 25X1
3. Comment. Prof. Dr. Muessemier is a member of the Veterinary Faculty, Humboldt University, Berlin. Prof. Dr. Dobberstein is Director of the Institute for Veterinary Pathology, Veterinary Faculty, Humboldt University. 25X1
4. Comment. No further information is available on the identity of the benzol derivative or on the doses necessary to induce the toxic condition. 25X1

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